

# Virginia's Guide for Parents of First-Year College Students



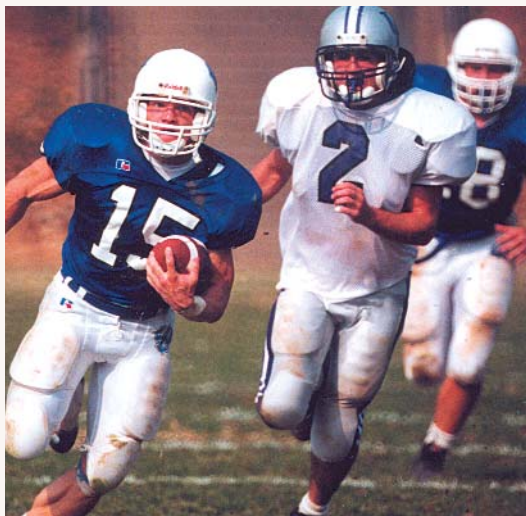


Virginia Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control  
2901 Hermitage Road, Richmond, VA 23220 / [www.abc.virginia.gov](http://www.abc.virginia.gov)

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The Education Section of the Virginia Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control (ABC) developed this resource. At Virginia ABC, we are committed to being a driving force in alcohol prevention and responsible decision-making. We continually offer training and resources to the campus community of Virginia. If you would like more information on our efforts, please visit [www.abc.virginia.gov](http://www.abc.virginia.gov) or contact us at (804) 213-4688.





# A Turning Point

Your son or daughter is a first-year college student—what an exciting time! It is a period of preparation and anticipation, excitement and apprehension. This time represents a turning point in your relationship with your son or daughter. He or she will be away from home, perhaps for the first time and may not admit it, but feels insecure in a new social setting and wants to fit in. You can be a big help in your student's successful transition to college life. This booklet provides you with information that will help you talk with your son or daughter about underage drinking and for those of age, issues surrounding heavy drinking.





*Most college students make responsible  
decisions about the use of alcohol.*

*Yet balancing these new experiences can be difficult.*



# Opportunities & Challenges



For many parents and young adults, bringing up the subject of alcohol is not easy. You may be unsure of when or how to begin and your student may try to dodge the conversation.

However, it is important for you to be aware of the risks and consequences associated with alcohol so you can prepare your student.

Impaired judgment from drinking can lead to risky behavior causing academic, legal and personal problems. For years, scare tactics have been used in an effort to curb risky behavior; however, this strategy has proven cumbersome and inefficient. It is often more effective for you to help your student understand that “not everyone is doing it.” They should be aware that students across Virginia are developing positive behaviors concerning drinking.

# Alcohol & the Brain

Current research tells us that the brain is still developing until the early- to mid-20s, and regular, especially heavy, drinking impairs learning and memory. Teens may not only affect their brain on a given night or weekend of drinking, but possibly for the rest of their lives.

Alcohol damages two key brain areas, the prefrontal area and the hippocampus. The prefrontal region of the brain controls thinking, planning, sound judgment decisions and impulse control; this area experiences the most change during adolescence. The hippocampus, involved in learning and memory, suffers the greatest from alcohol damage during teen years. Alcohol inhibits the process of storing new information in the hippocampus, which may cause your teen to impair his or her memory for life.

## Communication

Show you care when you talk to your son or daughter. He or she is maturing, and college will bring more freedom. Be direct when discussing drinking at school and talking about safety, money, responsibility, life skills and academics. Along with expectations, it is important to discuss *consequences*. Students have a responsibility to their campus community. Show your interest by continuing the dialogue once he or she is on campus. You need to draw the line, but understand that your son or daughter is growing up. Most of all, believe in your own power to help them avoid trouble:

- Be a role model.
- Be factual and straightforward.
- Information is always the best defense.
- Avoid scare tactics.
- Correct misperceptions.

It is important to talk with your son or daughter often. You do not need to cover every topic in one conversation. Lecturing will get you nowhere—providing information is the key.

**EXPECT THE BEST.** The college campus is a service-rich environment that can assist your son or daughter with study skills, leadership development, volunteerism, career resources and time management. Set expectations about class attendance, time usage (study time vs. free time), lines of communication,



healthy methods to alleviate stress and issues surrounding the illegal use alcohol. For those of age, make sure they understand that it is easy to have fun at college without drinking.

**VALUABLE INFORMATION.** Your family's values have never been more important. You may feel your student knows your family values, but it is a good idea to restate your ideals. Young adults rely heavily upon parental opinions and values. Your first-year student needs to know how to relate the values you have instilled to the choices he/she will be facing.

**PRIORITIES.** Several factors lead to a successful collegiate career. It is important to emphasize certain priorities in order to achieve excellence. Remind your son or daughter that he or she is responsible for sleeping habits, health, nutrition and sexual behaviors. All factors considered can have an impact on getting good grades.

**MORE MEANS LESS.** Alcohol is associated with missed classes and poor performance causing lower grade point averages (GPAs). On the average, the more drinks a student consumes each week, the lower the GPA. If you are concerned about poor grades, consider addressing study time and the possible use of alcohol with your son or daughter.

**SAFE & SECURE.** Help your student understand his or her right to be safe. Others who do drink can affect students who do not drink, causing problems like interrupted study time, assault or unwanted sexual advances. Students should discuss problems with an offender when possible. If that fails, they should ask for help by contacting the counseling center, resident assistant, academic advisor, student health office or campus police/security.

**DON'T TELL TALES.** Your son or daughter may interpret stories of drinking during college as approval of dangerous alcohol consumption. Be honest when asked, but avoid glamorizing high-risk use.

**COMMON SENSE.** Make sure your student understands that alcohol can be toxic and alcohol poisoning can kill. Ask your son or daughter to have the common sense and self-confidence to intervene when they see someone risking his or her life by drinking dangerously.

**VOLUNTEERING.** Encourage your student to join volunteer organizations in the college community. It helps structure free time and provides students with a broader outlook and healthier respect for their lives. Students may contact the student affairs office on campus for information on volunteer opportunities.

**MAKING IT CLEAR.** Underage drinking and alcohol-impaired driving are against the law. You should openly tell your son or daughter that you disapprove of underage drinking, dangerous alcohol consumption, driving while under the influence of alcohol and riding in the car with an impaired driver.

**NON-ALCOHOL-CENTERED EVENTS.** Events centered on fun are more frequent at colleges than in the past years. Service learning trips are becoming increasingly popular alternatives to the traditional spring and fall break programs. Students can contact the student affairs office on campus for information on programs and how to get involved in planning them.

Communicate with your student in new ways by becoming a better listener, asking questions and trying not to react in a way that will shut down the conversation. It is important to know and understand the campus culture. Talk to your son or daughter about his or her beliefs regarding the frequency of drinking that occurs on campus. If your student says things that challenge you, try not to react harshly and explain that you want to prepare them for a good college experience. Be prepared to correct any misperceptions. Invite a discussion and avoid lecturing. Talk to your son or daughter at a time and place for an easy give-and-take of ideas. Make sure they understand that you recognize them as young adults.

## *Where to Draw the Line*

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# Alcohol Poisoning

Many students who consume large and dangerous quantities of alcohol may not realize its damaging effects. Alcohol depresses nerves that control involuntary actions such as breathing, heartbeat and the gag reflex. After the student stops drinking, the heart keeps beating and the alcohol in the stomach continues to enter the bloodstream and circulate throughout the body. This can lead to alcohol poisoning. Death is imminent if your student chokes on his or her own vomit or if his or her heartbeat or breathing stops. Even if the student survives alcohol poisoning, he or she may face irreversible brain damage. Talk with your child about dangerous activities associated with alcohol, like drinking contests; these pursuits could lead to serious health problems or death.

## Career Consequences

Young adults' decisions follow them into the future. Give them beneficial information to make wise choices.

You are investing in your son's or daughter's future by providing the knowledge and support to help him or her make informed decisions.

Students who drink heavily in college may not realize their full academic potential. In addition, the effects of drinking may reach beyond the classroom. Many companies routinely screen for drugs and alcohol before considering applicants for a job or internship. If a position has already been granted, the employer may withdraw the offer if a positive screening for drugs and/or alcohol is found.

Businesses are increasingly conducting extensive background checks on potential employees. Graduates may be denied employment opportunities as a result of alcohol-related criminal convictions. Even acquittals may remain on their permanent record. The fact is, drinking by persons under the age of 21 is illegal, and it may have serious short- and long-term consequences.





## Currently in Virginia

The Commonwealth of Virginia has taken a strong stance to curb underage drinking and heavy drinking by college students.

Virginia's current strategy encourages each college and university to develop or renew a foundational plan to reduce irresponsible and illegal drinking. This plan focuses on rebuilding or reviving campus culture to include personal responsibility, scholarship and citizenship, while educating students about health and safety hazards of alcohol and drugs and vigorously enforcing the state's alcohol and drug laws on and off-campus.

One very important piece of the recommendation is to empower parents to actively engage in discussion with their son or daughter about the legal and, for those of age, responsible use of alcohol.

## The Laws in Virginia

All states and the District of Columbia have laws making 21 the minimum age to purchase or drink alcohol. Virginia's Zero Tolerance law makes driving under the influence of any amount of alcohol or drugs a serious criminal offense.

Young adults (ages 18–20) caught buying, possessing or drinking alcohol can lose their driver's license for up to a year, be fined up to \$2,500 and face up to 12 months in jail.

Using a fake ID to buy alcohol means losing the right to drive for a year and a minimum fine of \$500.

A driver, age 20 or younger, with a blood alcohol level between .02 and .07 could lose his or her license for up to six months. Impaired driving begins with the first drink.

Knowing the law is important, but it is not enough. It takes a commitment to personal responsibility to remain safe and alcohol-free. Talk with your son or daughter about these issues before he or she heads off to school and continue talking with them while they are on campus.

## Parental Notification

Parental notification became a part of Virginia law in 1998. Congress gave colleges and universities the ability to disclose alcohol or controlled substance violations to parents. These include violations of state and federal laws as well as school policies and rules governing the use or possession of alcohol or controlled substances.

Federal law recognizes a parent's right to be notified if their son or daughter is involved in risky or illegal behavior such as underage drinking, public drunkenness, drugs or criminal activity. The law permits, but does not require, schools to notify parents any time a student under 21 violates drug or alcohol laws.

Check with the dean of students or the student affairs office at your son's or daughter's college or university to discover the policy concerning parental notification. Ask what circumstances routinely trigger notification. It may be possible for you to arrange to be notified in the event of an incident involving alcohol.

*Availability of Alcohol + Lack of Parental Influence + Desire to fit in =  
Possible Negative Outcomes*

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# Resources

The following Web sites provide information about alcohol and its consumption, particularly on college campuses, as well as information about laws associated with alcohol.

1. Virginia Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control ([www.abc.virginia.gov](http://www.abc.virginia.gov))
2. Higher Education Center ([www.edc.org/hec/](http://www.edc.org/hec/)) or the Parent Connection ([www.edc.org/hec/parents/](http://www.edc.org/hec/parents/))
3. College Drinking: Changing the Culture ([www.collegedrinkinglevelup.org](http://www.collegedrinkinglevelup.org))
4. Facts on Tap ([www.factsonatop.org](http://www.factsonatop.org))
5. Adult Children of Alcoholics ([www.adultchildren.org](http://www.adultchildren.org))
6. Prevention Research Institute ([www.askpri.org](http://www.askpri.org))
7. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration ([www.nhtsa.gov](http://www.nhtsa.gov))
8. Governor's Office for Substance Abuse Prevention ([www.gosap.virginia.gov](http://www.gosap.virginia.gov))
9. National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information ([www.health.org](http://www.health.org))
10. Bacchus and Gamma Peer Education Network ([www.bacchusgamma.org](http://www.bacchusgamma.org))
11. The Center on Alcohol Marketing and Youth (<http://camy.org>)

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# You Have a Role

This is an exciting time for your son or daughter. You have a large role in preparing them to make responsible choices. Often, students make choices without thinking how those choices will affect them later. By sharing the information in this booklet beforehand, you help them make conscientious decisions. While you may not be able to actively monitor your student away from home, you can be available to talk and listen. You are shaping your son's or daughter's character, and you may be saving your child's life.

# Believe in your power to help your son or daughter avoid trouble with drinking at school.

- Be a role model.
- Be factual and straightforward.
- Information is always the best defense.
- Avoid scare tactics.
- Correct misperceptions.

Your son or daughter is a first-year college student—what an exciting time! It is a period of preparation and anticipation, excitement and apprehension. This time represents a turning point in your relationship with your son or daughter. He or she will be away from home, perhaps for the first time and may not admit it, but feels insecure in a new social setting and wants to fit in. You can be a big help in your student's successful transition to college life. This booklet provides you with information that will help you talk with your son or daughter about under-age drinking and for those of age, issues surrounding heavy drinking.



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